Desert Knight

2019 EDITION, VOL 1

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2018 New Mexico State Champion – Corbin Gustafson (right)

After a few years on hiatus, we are pleased to announce (thanks to the tireless efforts of Douglas Thigpen and several others) the Desert Knight is back!

We have put together a fun and exciting issue for your delight. We hope you enjoy it and hopefully learn something other than what openings your New Mexico opponents play.

Upcoming events and solutions to tactics

A NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Hello Fellow Chess Players,

A new year is upon us. Many of us will make resolutions: to eat healthier, get more exercise, save money, focus on self-care etc. . . As it goes with many of us, we'll sign up for the gym, cut a hole in the bottom of our mattresses to stash our extra cache of dough, then maybe we'll buy a year's supply of frozen berries and kale at Costco to make (with the fancy new Nutribullet we bought for next to free on black Friday)! March then rolls around. We're paying for a gym membership we haven't used in weeks, all that remains from our stash is the hole we made, and the berries in our freezer are so frostbitten not even the dog will eat them. On this I would proffer a word of advice.

Let 2019 be different.

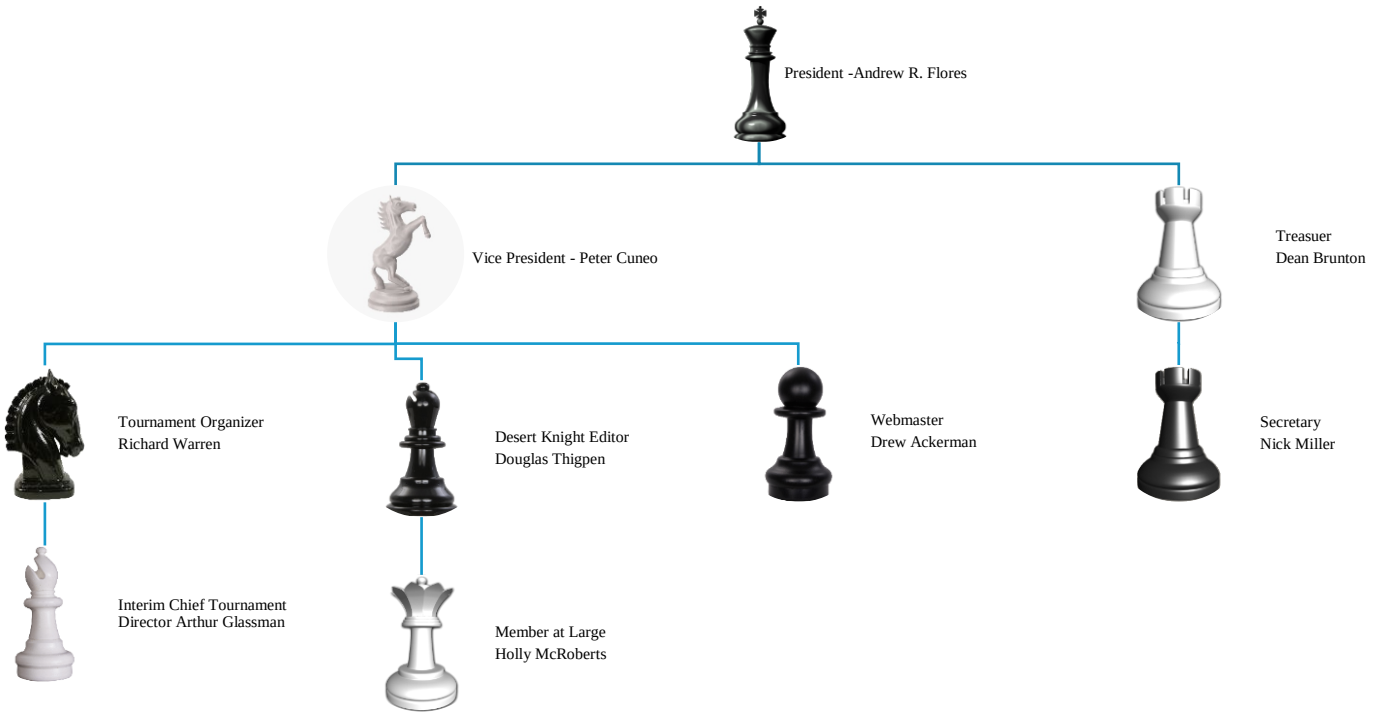
Have your usual list of 3-4 things, (because let's face it, they're obligatory), but let's add an additional one. One that is more quantifiable, one that is not only attainable but will give you more joy and a greater sense of satisfaction than you will receive if you accomplish any other thing on your list. Make your resolution a chess resolution.

Your chess resolution should consist of no less than two parts. Part 1, make a goal on how many games you want to play in 2019, regular/classical rated games. Start off by looking up your rating history and see how many games you played in 2018. If you played less than 20 games, your goal should be to play 20 games over what you did last year. If you played 21-35, your goal should probably be to increase the amount by 15, 36-59 an additional 5-10 games would suffice. If you managed to play 60+ rated games in 2018, first of all pat yourself on the back, and then make your goal for 2019 to do the same.

Part 2, of your chess resolution, of course should have a rating goal attached to it. If you haven't played a lot in the last year, maybe your goal should be to maintain your current rating. If you're an active to semi active player (20+ rated games in 2018), my recommendations would be: novice (below 1200) a goal of 200-300 points, intermediate players (1200-1799) increasing 100-200 depending on your ambition, advanced players (1800-1999) is there really another goal other than breaking the 2000 barrier and being a titled player? 2000-2099 a reasonable goal would be to increase by 100 points, 2100+ to reach the ultimate goal (as far as US Chess is concerned) and earn the lifelong title of Master! These are just recommendations, but take some time and give it some serious thought, and ask yourself, on January 1st, 2020, what do you want your rating to be?

We're here to help get you to that next level. I'm very excited for 2019, the NMCO board has an all-star crew. In years past, we've acted like a bull in a china shop, and while we'll do our best to pick up the pieces and glue everything back together, and even though we can't make it all perfect again, we'll definitely try to. With the exception of our treasurer, everyone can be consider a new, or old new face. Many of the things that are good or great about New Mexico Chess will stay the same, but we're also going to be innovative. We're not going to do the bare minimum and pat ourselves on the back; we're going to make progress! There will be quite a bit of new stuff, and a reasonable amount of change; but whenever a change is made, rest assured a lot of thought had been given to the change, and all of the pros and cons were weighed. With all of that said. I'm going to ask two favors of all of you reading this. First, each board member is a volunteer, and from my experiences with them, pretty awesome individuals. So I ask you all to treat them with the highest level of respect; any type of mistreatment won't be tolerated. Second, come and play chess! The more you participate the more great events we can bring you. So in the words of Ellen, "Be kind to one another."

New Mexico Chess Organization's Officers



Desert Knight contributors

Matt Grinberg

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My extensive thanks to each of our contributors for their work on this issue.

Evaluation Symbols	
Excellent Move	!!
Strong Move	!
Interesting Move	!?
Dubious Move	?!

Questionable Move	?
Blunder	??
Check	+
Double Check	+ +
Checkmate	#

TACTICS

Tactic #1

☐	Flores,Andrew	2156
■	Haase,Pavel	2206

White to move -Intermediate

Tactic #2

☐	Shevkunov,Vladyslav	1989
■	Flores,Andrew	2174

Black to move -Intermediate

Tactic #3

☐	Mollica,Joseph	1834
■	Flores,Andrew	2154

Black to move -Intermediate

Tactic #4

☐	Flores,Andrew	2154
■	Romero,Jonah	2031

White to move - Easy

The Class Championship was played in August in Albuquerque. What makes this tournament unique to others, is that it has many sections and produces many champion titles. These being the Master/expert champion, the Class A champion, Class B champion, Class C champion, Class D champion, and Class E champion. With so many players vying for so many titles, the motivation to play at one's best was high for many competitors, leading to some great games.

NM Class Championship, Master/Expert section, Round 2
Daniel Herman (1961) v. Corbin Gustafson (2057)

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 e6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 Nc6 5. Nc3 Qc7 6. g3 a6

For an incredibly famous demonstration of why Black should play a6 here, see Fischer vs. Tal, Bled, 1961.

7. Bg2 d6 8. 0-0 Bd7 9. Re1 Be7 10. Nf5!?

As White eyes the uncastled Black king, Tal games dancing in his eyes, he decides that this will not be a dull game.

10. … exf5 11. Nd5 Qd8 12. Be3 Kf8!

Smooth as butter. The Black monarch calmly steps aside, denying both the e1-rook and the would-have-been c7-knight their intended target.

13. Bb6 Qc8

No doubt White has more active pieces, but those same pieces are struggling to find a target.

14. Nxe7 Ngxe7 15. Qxd6 h5 16. exf5? …

Better would have been the immediate 16. Rad1 challenging the bishop. If 16. … Be8 Black's pieces are exactly as cramped as they look. If 16. … Be6 then White crashes through with 17. exf5 Bxf5 18. Rxe7! Nxe7 19. Bxb7! when the threat of mate at d8 forces catastrophic losses from Black. Such a tactic would have been impressive to discover in the heat of the game, but White will sorely regret missing this chance as the gates of Fort Gustafson never again opened to give him another chance.

16. … Rh6 17. Qa3 Kg8 18. Be3 Rh7 19. f6 gxf6 20. Bb6 Ng6 21. Rad1 h4 22. Rd6 hxg3 23. fxg3 Kg7

The Black king steps forward to defend his followers, fearlessly staring into the face of danger.

24. Qf3 Be6 25. Ref1 f5 26. Qc3+ Nce5 27. Bc7?! Bc4!

The hunter becomes the hunted. Try as they might, White's pieces never found their mark against Black's ironclad defenses. The more plentiful Black pieces now swarm their off-balance counterparts.

28. Qa5 Bxf1 29. Rd8 Qe6 30. Bd5 Nf3+!

A fine move which rapidly brings the game to an end.

31. Kxf1 …

If 31. Bxf3 Qe3+ White's days are just as numbered.

31. … Nxh2+ 32. Kf2 Ng4+ 33. Kf1 Qe3 0-1

NM Class Championship, Master/Expert section, Round 1

Corbin Gustafson (2057) v. Brady Barkemeyer (1867)

1. Nf3 d5 2. c4 c6 3. g3 Bg4 4. Bg2 Nf6 5. Ne5 dxc4

I don't like Black's setup. I'm suspicious of giving up the g4-bishop and would prefer to keep it with Bf5. But if Black insists on not moving it, I'd prefer to keep the d5-pawn and bolster it with e6 to limit the scope of the g2-bishop.

6. Nxg4 Nxg4 7. Na3 e6 8. Nxc4 Bc5 9. e3 Nf6 10. Qb3 Bb6

It may seem like an early claim, but White is already close to having a strategically won position. White's active pieces, his enormous space advantage, Black's b7 weakness, and his awkward b6-bishop all add up to a position that will require a grueling defense for Black.

11. a4! …

Not missing a beat, White senses the b6-bishop is the only thing holding Black's position together and pushes at it before Black can coordinate a defense.

11. … Qc7?

11. … Qd7 may have been necessary. The game move allows White to finish in style.

12. a5 Bc5 13. d4 Be7

14. Nb6! Nbd7

If 14. … axb6 15. axb6 with a discovery on the beleaguered a8-rook.

15. Nxa8 0-0??

It's easy enough to get flustered after missing a tactic in a game. I've certainly done it once or eighty times before.

16. Nxc7

A crushing victory for the would-be-soon class champion.

1-0

NM Class Championship, Master/Expert section, Round 5

Munir Hammad (1829) v. Andrew Ackerman (1947)

Notes by Andrew Ackerman

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5 a6 4. Ba4 Nf6 5. 0-0 Be7 6. Re1 b5 7. Bb3 d6 8. a4 …

I was unfamiliar with what to do with this move. I figured I might as well move my bishop to b7 now as that is where I usually have it when I play the Ruy Lopez.

8. … Bb7 9. c3 Nb8

I knew this would be a sub optimal move, but I usually play the Breyer system. So I played it to get to positions I am more familiar playing with.

10. d4 Nbd7 11. Nbd2 0-0 12. Bc2 c5 13. axb5 axb5 14. Rxa8 Bxa8

I went back and forth trying to decide with which piece to recapture. In the end I decided to go with the bishop, but couldn't think of any concrete reason on which would be better. Worth noting the computer slightly prefers to capture back with the Queen.

15. Nf1 Qb6 16. Ng3 g6

Felt awkward pushing g6 here, but I didn't want to give his knight the f5 square.

17. Bh6 Re8 18. Bb3 c4 19. Bc2 Ng4 20. Bc1 Bf8 21. h4 …

This move caught me off guard. I didn't think I had anything to fear from an h5 push though.

21. … d5

Time to break open the middle and give life to my light square bishop!

This is the recommended line by the computer. I, however, wasn't brave enough to play h5 fearing a f4-f5 break later in the game.21... h5 22. Bg5 exd4 23. Nxd4 Nc5.

22. Ng5 Ngf6 23. exd5 Nxd5

Much stronger continuation I missed. This leaves White with a severely weakened pawn structure. 23... exd4 24. Rxe8 Nxe8 25. cxd4 Nef6.

24. h5 N5f6 25. hxg6 hxg6 26. Be3 Qb7 27. f3 Qc7 28. N3e4 Nd5 29. Bf2 Bh6 30. Bg3? f5

Hard to turn down the opportunity to win a piece. My king might have safety problems, but his pieces aren't too coordinated against it at the moment and I was confident I could repel any attack.

31. dxe5 fxe4 32. Nxe4 Nxe5 33. f4 Bxf4!!

After the game I thought that this is where I blundered my advantage away, as my follow up will show. However, to my great surprise this is a completely crushing move. White is simply lost.

34. Bxf4 Qb6+??

Hoping to defend the f6 square before recapturing the bishop.

There are so many crazy deep lines that I am cannot even be mad at myself for not seeing it. I am just in awe of what the computer was able to find so easily. Here is just one of the possible continuations: 34... Nxf4!! 35. Nf6+ Kf7 36. Nxe8 Qc5+ 37. Qd4 Nf3+!! Now this is just showing off. 38. gxf3 Qg5+ 39. Kf2 Qh4+ 40. Ke3 Ng2+ 41. Kd2 Qxe1#

35. Qd4 …

I am not sure why I missed this move in my calculation, but here I realized I gave back my piece advantage and was back to square 1.

35. … Qxd4+ 36. cxd4 Ng4 37. Bd2 Kg7 38. Ra1 Bc6 39. Ra7+ Re7 40. Ra6 Nde3 41. Rxc6 Nxc2 42. Nd6 Nxd4

This move serves multiple purposes. First, it straight up wins a pawn, but also tries to lure my opponent into a trap.

43. Bc3 Kh7

I held my breath, hoping my opponent would fall for the trap!

44. Rb6 …

He didn't bite! The knight is of course poisoned by the unconventional back rank mate. 44. Bxd4 Re1#

44. … Ne2+ 45. Kf1 Ne3+ 46. Kf2 Nd1+ 47. Kf3?? …

Here my spidey sense was tingling. I could smell the mate, but couldn't find it. I almost moved on with my original plan of Nxc3 with just 12 minutes left on my clock, but instead I gave it a second look. And then I finally found it. Black to play mate in 4.

47. … Re3+ 48. Kg4 Rg3+ 49. Kh4 g5+ 0-1

NM Class Championship, Section B, Round 4

Christian von Huene (1656) v. Matthew Bryant (1774)

Notes by Christian von Huene

1. d4 Nf6 2. Bg5 e6 3. e4 h6 4. Bxf6 Qxf6 5. c3 b6 6. Bd3 Bb7 7. Ne2 Qd8!

The best place for the queen.

8. 0-0 Be7 9. Nd2 0-0 10. f4 d6 11. e5 dxe5 12. fxe5 c5 13. Nf3 …

White is convinced it's the French, Tarrasch.

13. … Nc6 14. Rc1? …

The f3 knight is overloaded.

14. … cxd4 (14. … Bg5-+) **15. cxd4 Nb4 16. Bb1 Rc8 17. Rxc8 Qxc8 18. a3 Nd5**

This knight gives Black equality.

19. Qd3 …

This sometimes works.

19. … g6 20. h4!?

Not the strongest.

20. … Ba6!

Preventing any attack.

21. Qe4 Bb7 22. Rc1 …

Not the best, but Black has signaled a disdain for losing tempo.

22. … Nc7?

The knight belongs to d5. 22. … Nc3? was carefully calculated and rejected by both players. 23. Rxc3 Bxe4 (23. … Qxc3 24. Nxc3 Bxe4 25. Nxe4+-) 24. Rxc8 Bxb1 25. Rc7 +-

23. Qc2 Nd5 24. Qd3 …

Winning a useful tempo.

24. … Qe8 25. h5 Kg7!

Good defense.

26. Nc3? …

Thinking that the knight will be trapped on h5.

26. … Nf4 27. Qe3 Bxf3 28. Qxf3 Nxh5 29. Ne4 (29. g4 Bg5 The move White missed. 30. Rf1 Nf4-+) **29. … Bg5 30. Nd6 Qd7 31. Rc4!**

The rook becomes a tower.

31. … Nf4 32. Be4 Qe7 (32. … f6-+) **33. Kf2?**

Bad waiting move. 33. g3 Nh5 34. Kh2 +-

33. … Nh5 34. g3 f6! 35. Nc8??

Both players fell below 5 minutes, putting any result on the table.

35. … Qd7 36. Qc3 fxe5+ 37. Kg2 Bd8 (37. … exd4 38. Rxd4 Qxc8-+ overlooked.) **38. dxe5 Qf7 39. Bf3 Qf5 40. Nd6 Qg5 41. Rg4!**

Winning, and all but exhausting the remaining time. The remainder was played on delay.

41. …Qe7 42. Qd3 g5 43. Rd4 Bc7 44.Bxh5 Bxd6 45. Qg6+ Kh8 46. Qxh6+ Kg8 47. exd6 Qb7+ 48. Kg1 Rf1+ 49. Kxf1 Qh1+ 50. Kf2 Qh2+ 51. Kf3 Qh1+ 52. Kg4 Qb1 53. Qg6+ 1-0

NM Class Championship, Class C, Round 3

Will Barela (1526) v. Anthony Sandoval (1236)

1. d4 Nf6 2. Bf4 g6 3. Nf3 d6 4. e3 Bg7 5. Bd3 c5 6. c3 0-0 7. 0-0 Nh5 8. Bg3 Nxg3 9. fxg3?!

Bold, ambitious, and more than a little risky. White hopes to use the f-file to stir up activity on the kingside, but, objectively, this is just too weakening.

9. … Qb6

Black begins a plan of targeting the newly weakened dark squares.

10. Qc2 Bh6 11. Nbd2!? …

Scolded by the computer, which prefers 11. Re1, but I think White's plan of sacrificing his weak pawn to activate his pieces, and target both of Black's active pieces, is both human and creative.

11. … Bxe3+ 12. Kh1 cxd4 13. Nc4 Qc5? 14. b4 …

14. cxd4! Bxd4 15. b4! Leaves the bishop abandoned in the middle of the board.

14. … Qc7 15. Nxe3 dxe3 16. Rae1 …

The battle lines are drawn: Black has returned from a pawn hunt unscathed, but White's pieces are poised and dangerous. White must make the most of his attack or Black will surely carry the endgame.

16. … e5 17. Rxe3 Be6 18. Ng5 Nd7 19. Ref3 d5?

Black stumbles at the end of an otherwise accurate game. White's attack now crashes through with ruthless efficiency. Better was 19. … Bd5 to deny White's knight a vital target.

20. Bxg6 …

Strong, but it gives Black a second chance. Better was the immediate 20. Nxe6!

20. … hxg6?

The last chance to cling to survival was the counter-intuitive 20. … fxg6! giving back the piece to tame White's attack.

21. Nxe6 fxe6 22. Qxg6+ Kh8 23. Rf7! Rxf7 24. Rxf7 1-0

NM Class Championship, Class E, Round 5

Joseph Wang (1197) v. Manuel Castillo (1040)

Notes by Joseph's coach, Christian von Huene

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 Nf6 5. Nc3 a6 6. Bc4 d6 7. Be3 e6 8. Nf3?! …

White wishes to retain the king's knight for action on the kingside. An interesting experiment, but positionally the pawn looks better on f3.

8. … Be7 9. Qd2 Bd7 10. 0-0-0 0-0 11. h4 Na5 12. Bd3! …

Strongest. Also counterintuitive, since Black will have the option of cloistering the priest with e5. However, that will give the White d5 and a critical tempo.

12. … Nc6

Not a bad move, as horses like the greener grass in the center. White was expecting Rc8 followed by Nc4.

13. h5 h6

Natural, but offering White the initiative and a lever with g4, g5.

14. Nh2 Nxh5?

White has a plan centered around the fantastic development of the king's knight. Black is drifting, planless.

15. Ng4 e5 16. Be2? …

This safety move is not incisive enough for such a position. White was concerned with a possible bishop fork on g4 if he were to take on h5 immediately. As Nxh6 is the continuation of a plan White has been preparing for a few moves now, it makes sense to spend some time calculating and evaluating. 16. Nxh6+ gxh6 17. Rxh5 Bg4 18. Rxh6 Bxd1 19. Qxd1 +- …)

16. … Qc8 17. Nxh6+! gxh6 18. Bxh6 Re8 19. Rxh5 Bg4 20. Bxg4 Qxg4 21. Rdh1 Rac8 22. Bg5 f6 23. Rh8+ Kg7 24. R8h7+ Kg8 25. Rh8+ Kf7 26. Qd5+ Qe6 27. R8h7+ Kg6 28. Qxe6 Nd4 29. Qf7+ Kxg5 30. Qh5+ Kf4 31. Rh4# 1-0

A very exciting game, which decided first place. I very much enjoyed the ideas White created in this game.

The NM Open was played in November. The NM Open is generally the biggest tournament of the year for our state, and for no small reason, as this tournament decides our state champion and features our annual election for state officers. For a grand description of this year's event, see Matt Grinberg's article on page 26.

NM Open, Open section, Round 1

Peter Berzanskis (1808) v. Eddie Wyckoff (2035)

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 e6 3. Nc3 Bb4 4. Bg5 0-0 5. e4 d6 6. e5?! …

White grabs space in the center, but at the price of opening lines towards his own uncastled king. At first glance, White seems appears entirely fine, as most of Black's pieces are out of the game and White has more defending pieces than there are attackers to protect his brave monarch. However, Wyckoff will demonstrate how quickly an army can move when an unprotected king is at stake.

6. … dxe5 7. dxe5 Qxd1+ 8. Rxd1 Ne4 9. Bd2 Nxd2

Trading White's most useful defender and enticing White's king ever so slightly more into the game.

10. Kxd2 Nc6! 11. f4? f6!

With each move, Black brings new attackers into the game. With the gift of hindsight, I'm sure White would have liked to develop his pieces faster. Even now, 11. Nf3! would get his pieces out in time.

12. exf6 Rxf6 13. g3 e5!

Black rips open every obstacle between his pieces and White's king. Meanwhile, White's whole kingside seems to have set their alarm clocks for well into the middlegame.

14. fxe5 Nxe5 15. Bd3 Nxd3!

Black gets his last pieces into the game with gains of time. White's king, separated from his sleeping army and alone in the middle of the board, will be a sitting duck.

16. Kxd3 Bf5+ 17. Kd4

17…Re8

Winning even faster, and in style, would have been 17. … Rd8+! when after 18. Ke3 Bc5+ 19. Ke2 Bg4+ White's time is very limited. I invite the reader to explore some lines for themselves as there are rich tactics and checkmates to discover. Perhaps the most convincing line against natural moves White might try is 20. Ke1 Bf2+ 21. Kf1 Bd4+ 22. Ke1 Bxc3+ 23. bxc3 Rxd1#

18. c5 Rd8+ 19. Kc4 Rxd1 20. Nxd1 Be4

Black liquidates the position into an easily winning endgame.

21. Kxb4 Bxh1 22. Ne2 Bf3 23. Ndc3 Bxe2 24. Nxe2 Rf2 0-1

A great demonstration by Wyckoff in attacking the uncastled king and a reminder how quickly a passive position can become overwhelmingly active.

NM Open, Section 2, Round 1

Paul Dejong (1276) v. Paul Padilla (1669)

In this battle of the Pauls, White doesn't let his opponent's 400 rating advantage push him around, but Black's tenacious defense saves the day in the end.

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 c5 3. d5 b5 4. e3 d6 5. cxb5 a6 6. Nc3 g6 7. a4 Bg7 8. Bc4 0-0 9. Nge2 Nfd7 10. e4 Ne5 11. Qb3?!

Call me biased towards bishops, but I'm not a fan of this move at all. The problem is that an explosive position like this is likely to turn into a wide open position at any moment, when the bishops will be superior. Yes, the c4-bishop is hemmed in on nearly all sides, yes, the bishop resembles a tall pawn, but it's the potential of the bishop to be valuable later that shouldn't be underestimated. Instead I prefer the strange-looking 11. Ba2, keeping an eye on any … e6 breaks Black might be thinking about. White can later gain space on the kingside, chase the knight to a worse square, and return the bishop to the open board with an eventual f4 and Bc4.

11. … Nxc4

Black doesn't actually need to take the bishop right away. Where's the bishop going to run? After 11. … Qa5! White must tread carefully. Black's pieces are active and dangerously poised, whereas White's position is utterly full of targets. A few sample lines of how quickly this can go wrong include 12. 0-0? Qb4! when White will lose a piece (13. Qxb4 cxb4 and White can't save the bishop and the knight). If instead 12. f4 Nxc4 13. Qxc4 axb5 14. Qxb5 Qxb5 15. Nxb5 Nxe4 and White has lost a precious center pawn.

12. Qxc4 axb5 13. Qxb5 Ba6 14. Qb3 Nd7 15. Nb5 Qb6 16. Ra3!

A strange move at first glance, but it unpins the a-pawn, most importantly, and even gives the rook some extra options on the third rank.

16. … Rfc8!?

The more obvious 16. … Rfb8 would have also been a fine move, but I sure love the creativity of launching the c-pawn down the board and having c5 for Black's pieces.

17. 0-0 c4 18. Qe3 Bxb5 19. Qxb6 Nxb6 20. axb5 Rxa3 21. bxa3 Na4?!

Maybe the first step in the wrong direction. Instead 21. … Rc5 would round up the b-pawn and keep Black's pieces actively placed.

22. Be3 Bb2 23. b6 c3 24. Bd4 Rb8 25. f4 Bxa3?

A blunder in a tense position. Black had a few good alternatives. 25. … Nxb6 would have rapidly boiled a wild position down to its roots. There might have followed 26. Bxc3 Bxa3 27. Rb1 Nd7 28. Rxb8+ Nxb8 with a position that's about as equal as equal positions get. Or, if Black wanted to keep more life in the position, there's 25. … f5!? undermining White's center, but also weakening Black's king.

26. Ra1! e5

Black, realizing his mistake, struggles, but White will not be denied his extra piece.

27. dxe6 Bb2 28. Rxa4 fxe6 29. Bxc3?!

It feels strange giving this move a dubious mark as White remains up a piece in what is ostensibly an easily won endgame. Nevertheless, White started this flurry of attacks and captures with a gigantic advantage and it slowly fades away, as we'll see. With the gift of hindsight, I prefer 29. Rb4 when the c-pawn will be quickly captured and White will retain his b-pawn who is ambitious to score a touchdown.

Bxc3 30. Nxc3 Rxb6 31. Kf2 Rb2+ 32. Kf3 Rb3 33. Rc4 h5 34. g4?! d5!

Black fights on, undaunted by the odds against him. The more pawns that come off the board, the harder Black makes White's job.

35. exd5 exd5 36. Rc8+ Kf7 37. Ke3 hxg4 38. Kd4 Rb2 39. Kxd5?!

White's getting low on pawns, and shouldn't trade or give them up unless it's necessary. I prefer 39. Rh8 clinging to as many pawns as possible.

Rxh2 40. Ke5?

Instead 40. Ne4! with White pieces circling Black's king like sharks in old movies, the game would not have lasted much longer.

40. … Rh5+! 41. Ke4 Rf5 42. Rc7+ Kg8 43. Ne2?!

Why's the knight retreating? Who's winning this game anyway? 43. Nd5! would have wrapped things up in short order.

Rf7 44. Rc3?!

Trading rooks would have made White's task far easier. 44. Rxf7 Kxf7 45. Nd4! when Black's king is boxed in and White has time for Ke3-f2-g3xg4. If Black ever plays … Kf6 and … g5 White can respond with f5, when Black's king must babysit White's f-pawn without counterplay.

Re7+ 45. Kd3 Kh7 46. Rc5 Kh6 47. Rg5 Rd7+ 48. Ke3 Rf7 49. Rxg4 Rf5 50. Ng3 Ra5 0.5-0.5

Sadly, we must chalk what happened in the remainder of this game to other great mysteries we cannot know, like what would have happened in Fischer vs Karpov, 1975. Still, we know Black's tenacity paid off in the end as he struggled triumphantly to hold the draw.

New Mexico Open, Open section, Round 4

Tim Martinson (1812) v. Matt Grinberg (1954)

Notes by Matt Grinberg

After seeing this game, Desert Knight Editor, Doug Thigpen, referred to it as "swashbuckling chess." So I just had to annotate it for the Desert Knight.

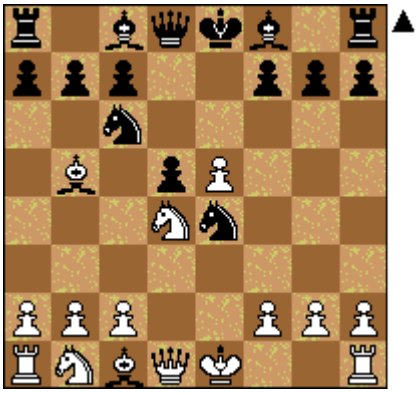
Coming into this fourth round game I was at 1-2. I was out of contention, but still hoped to put together a decent tournament. The win in this game spurred me on to 2.5-0.5 in the last three rounds and sixth place.

I had Black and the game transposed from a Center Game to a Two Knights Defense. Frustrated with my play up to this point in the tournament, I deliberately aimed for the sharpest possible line. An error early in the middle game led to a loss of material from which Tim could not recover.

1. e4 e5 2. d4!? Center Game: The Center Game is not highly regarded by theory, but scores well in practice. In general, when faced with unusual openings, it is a good idea to steer the game towards lines you are familiar with and/or avoid theoretical lines that the opponent is likely to know well. **2... exd4 3. Bc4**

[The standard Center Game line leads to equality. 3. Qxd4 Nc6 4. Qe3 Nf6 5. Nc3 Bb4 6. Bd2 O-O 7. O-O-O Re8=**]**

3... Nf6 4. Nf3 Nc6 This transposes to the Two Knights, putting me in familiar territory. **5. e5** White's e-pawn tries to disrupt the Black pieces. **5... d5** But this counter strike allows Black to hold his position in the center. **6. Bb5 Ne4 7. Nxd4**



7... Bc5!? My first inclination was to play the normal move 7... Bd7. But I wondered if someone who plays the Center Game would be unfamiliar with sharper lines of the Two Knights and could be led astray.

[The safe main line is 7... Bd7 8. Bxc6 bxc6 9. O-O Bc5 10. Be3 O-O=**]**

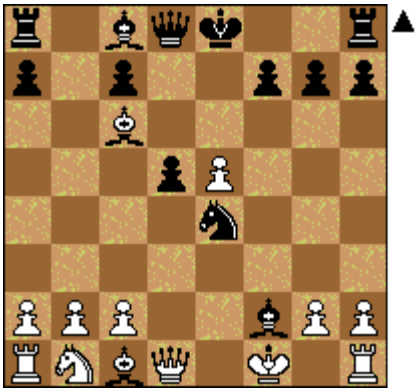
8. Nxc6!? My gamble immediately pays off. The attempt to win material looks strong, but is dubious because of the exposure of White's king.

[Transposing back to the main line is best. 8. Be3 Bd7 (Now that f2 is defended, persisting with the sacrifice on c6 is dubious. 8... O-O!? 9. Nxc6 bxc6 10. Bxc5 Nxc5 11. Bxc6 Rb8 12. O-O Rxb2 13. Qxd5 Qxd5 14. Bxd5 Rxc2 15. Na3 Re2 16. Rac1 Nd3 17. Rxc7 Be6 18. Bb3 a5 19. Ra7 Bxb3 20. axb3 Rxe5 21. Nc4 Rb5 22. Rb1 Nc5 23. Nxa5 Re8 24. g3 g6 25. b4 Nd3 26. Nc6 Re2 27. Rd7 Nxf2 28. Nd4 Nh3 29. Kh1 Nf2 30. Kg2 Nd1 31. Nxe2 1-0, Nakamura Hikaru (USA) 2816 - Onischuk, Alexander (USA) 2662 , Saint Louis 4/12/2015 USA Championship) 9. Bxc6 bxc6 10. O-O O-O=**]**

8... Bxf2 9. Kf1 bxc6

[9... Qh4 leads to a draw by repetition according to Houdini. 10. Nxa7 c6 11. Nxc8 Rxc8 12. Be2 Bb6 13. Qe1 Bf2 14. Qd1 Bb6=**]**

10. Bxc6



10... Kf8!

[10... Bd7? turns the initiative over to White. 11. Qxd5! O-O 12. Bxd7! Bb6 13. Ke2 Re8 14. Bc6 Qxd5 15. Bxd5 Ng3 16. hxg3 Rxe5 17. Kf3 Rxd5 White is a piece up**]**

11. b3?? White wants to Block the deadly check, Ba6, but the weakening of the a1 to h8 diagonal leads to the loss of White's queen rook.

[The best alternatives lead to unclear positions with chances for both sides. 11. c4 Qh4 12. Bxd5 Bg4 13. Qc2 Bb6 14. Bxe4 Bd1 15. Bg5 Bxc2 16. Bxh4 Bxe4 17. Nc3 Bd3 18. Ke1 Bxc4› Black has the bishop pair and White's e-pawn is weak, but it will also be difficult for Black to get his king rook into play**;**

11. Qd3 Bf5 12. Qf3 Bd7 13. e6 Bxe6 14. Bxa8 Qxa8 15. Nc3 Bb6 16. Nxe4 dxe4 17. Qc3› Black has two pawns for an exchange, the bishop pair and a strong passed e-pawn, but again it will be difficult for him to develop his king rook**]**

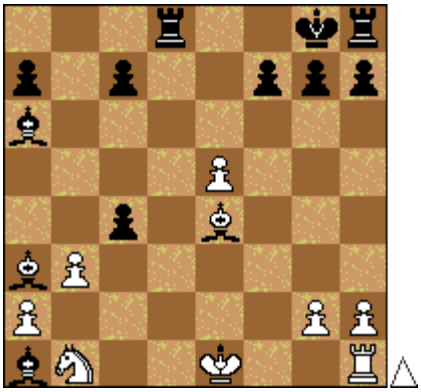
11... Ba6 12. c4 dxc4 13. Qxd8 The devastating threats of ... Qxd1# and c3 (or cxb3), winning White's queen in each case, left him with no choice but to trade.

[13. Qe2? cxb3 14. Nc3 (14. Qxa6 Qd1#) 14... Bxe2 15. Kxe2 Nxc3 16. Kxf2 Rb8 Black wins**]**

13... Rxd8 14. Bxe4N

[Here is the only game in my Chess Assistant database that reaches this position. 14. Ba3 Kg8 15. Bxe4 Bd4 Here this game has transposed back to Martinson-Grinberg. White tries a different defense from Tim's, but with no better result. 16. Nc3 cxb3 17. Ke1 Bxc3 18. Kf2 Bxa1 19. Rxa1 b2 20. Rb1 Rb8 21. Bxb2 h5 22. Ke3 Rh6 23. Rd1 Re6 24. Bf5 Ree8 25. Bd4 Bb7 26. g3 c5 27. Bc3 Red8 28. Re1 Bd5 29. Ba5 Re8 30. Kf4 Be6 31. Bb1 Rb2 32. Be4 Rxa2 33. Bc6 Rc8 34. Bb7 Rb8 35. Bc7 Rxb7 36. Bd6 Rb4 37. Re4 Rxe4 38. Kxe4 c4 39. Kd4 Rxh2 40. Bc5 a5 41. Kc3 Rg2 0-1, Rajeswaran, Kiruthika - Wallis, Ian J (ENG) 1977 , England 2/21/2010 England Championship (team) 2009/10 (2 div)**]**

14... Bd4 15. Ba3 Kg8 16. Ke1N Bxa1 Black has emerged from the complications with a rook and pawn for a knight. It will be difficult for him to develop his king rook, but once he gets that problem solved he will win.



17. e6 The e-pawn is lost anyway, so White uses it to disrupt Black's position. **17... fxe6 18. Rf1?!** Hoping to take advantage of the open f-file, White gives up another pawn.

[A better way to get the rook into play is 18. Bc5 Bd4 19. b4 c3 20. Bxd4 Rxd4 21. Nxc3 Rxb4 22. Kf2 Kf7 23. Rd1 But White is still an exchange and two pawns down**]**

18... cxb3 19. Rf4? He allows Black the opportunity to queen his pawn, but...

[Though better, 19. Rf2 Be5 20. g3 bxa2 21. Rxa2 leaves Black up an exchange and THREE pawns**]**

19... Be5? ... Black misses his chance.

[19... bxa2 20. Rf3 Be5 21. Be7 a1=Q Game over**]**

20. Rf2 bxa2 21. Rxa2 Bxh2 22. Be7? White misses another strong move for Black ...

[Or 22. Bc5 Bg3 23. Bf2 Bxf2 24. Kxf2 Rd6 and now White is down an exchange and FOUR pawns**]**

22... Bg3 ... and this time he doesn't miss it. White resigned. [0:1]

NM Open, Section 3, Round 5

Richard Dickhaut (969) v. John LeTard (1194)

1. Nf3 Nf6 2. g3 Nc6 3. d4 g6 4. b3 …

As a broad generalization, if a knight can be kicked in the center and can't run to another central square, it's best to kick it. (My tendency to kick horses that are in front of me is what kept me from being an effective rancher). In this case as well, the all-knowing computer points out a beautiful line that demonstrates how vulnerable the c6-knight really is. 4. d5 Nb4 5. a3! Nbxd5 6. c4 Nb6 7. c5 Nbd5 8. e4! when the knight is trapped and Nxe4 is met by Qxd5.

4. … Bg7 5. Bb2 d5 6. Nc3 Be6 7. Bg2 Qd7 8. 0-0 Bh3 9. e3 a6 10. Ne2 …

I like 10. Ne5 followed by f4, gaining space and putting the knight on a dominant central post. 10. … Nxe5? would be ill advised, as it would cost the d5-pawn.

10. … Bxg2 11. Kxg2 0-0-0 12. Nd2?! h5!

With weak squares around White's king, a noticeable lack of defenders on the kingside, and his own king tucked away safely on the queenside, Black begins an irresistible kingside onslaught.

13. h4 Ne4 14. Nxe4 dxe4 15. f3?! …

White fights back bravely against the impending storm headed to his king, but he only weakened his own kingside even further. 15. c4 or 15. Nc3 would have at least started a counterattack on the opposite side of the board.

15. … exf3+ 16. Rxf3 f6 17. Rf1 g5!

Knock knock!

18. hxg5 fxg5

White's task seems hopeless. His king is exposed, his pieces are not coordinated to defend, and Black's pieces have a myriad of possibilities for attack. Yet, Black's task is not as easy as it seems either. They say the hardest thing to do in chess is win a won game, and here too that holds truth.

19. Rh1 h4

19. … Qd5+! would be ruthlessly efficient. After 20. Kg1 Qf3 White's position is already coming apart at the seams.

20. gxh4 gxh4 21. Rh3 Qg4+ 22. Kh2 Rdf8

22. Be5+! exploiting the pin on the d-file, clears the g-file for a rook, rids White of one of his few defenders, and wins material after 22. Nf4 Bxf4+ 23. exf4 Qxf4+

23. Qe1 Rf3?

Trading pieces makes White's task far easier. After 23. … Rhg8! there are simply too many threats. White has many choices to defend, but everything fails to an attack with the bishop followed by a queen in White's face. For example, if 24. Rxh4 Be5+! or if 24. Nf4 Bh6! 25. Qf2 Bxf4 26. exf4 Rxf4 27. Qg1 Qe2+!

24. Ng1 Rxh3

It wasn't too late for 24. … Be5+! 25. dxe5 Rg8! when White's position will quickly collapse.

25. Nxh3 Bh6! 26. Qf2 Rf8 27. Qg2 Qxg2 28. Kxg2 Bxe3

When you can't find a checkmate, take all your opponent's pieces and go from there! White has survived the kingside attack only to find himself in an endgame that isn't much better.

29. c3 e5 30. dxe5 Nxe5 31. c4 Nd3 32. Bc3 Nf4+?!

The attack may be largely over, but Black's pieces remain far more active. Thus, trades still benefit White, and only White. After 32. … Rg8+! it is clear that Black's attack isn't over yet, and a misstep may still lead to a quick checkmate.

33. Nxf4 Rxf4 34. Rf1? h3+!

So close, but not close enough.

35. Kxh3 Rxf1

With a rook to the better, Black finished the game a few short moves later.

0-1

NM Open, Section 3, Round 5

Felipe Montes (1167) v. Marcelo Tohen (879)

Notes by Christian von Huene

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bc4 Bc5 4. d3 Nf6 5. Nc3 d6 6. Bg5 h6 7. Bxf6 Qxf6 8. Nd5 Qd8 9. Qe2 Bg4 10. Bb5 Rb8?!

A little experiment. The fact this turned out well for Black doesn't mean it's the strongest move.

11. h3 Bd7 12. Bxc6?

White is right to fear the dark knights, yet the force which stays on the board is still more concerning.

12. … bxc6

Winning a pawn.

13. Nc3 Rxb2 14. 0-0 g5?

After White's aggression, Black seeks the initiative on the kingside. It would deserve an exclamation mark if White did not threaten a fork.

15. Na4! …

Excellent fork, as the bishop on c5 is a tower of strength.

15. … Rb5 16. c4 Ra5 17. Nxc5 Rxc5 18. Qb2 g4!?

The maneuver Ra5-a6-b6 is worth a look, as the queen's rook isn't very good at pretending to be a bishop.

19. hxg4 Bxg4 20. Nh2!

Fancy tactics! 20. Nxe5 dxe5 21. Qb4 traps the rook as the queen must guard the coming skewer in the back rank. All is not as it seems, however, as Black has a winning move. See if you can find it. The solution is after the final move of the game.

Position in the above variation after 21. Qb4

20. … h5 21. Rab1 …

Perfectly natural, though the b-file proves a long road to nowhere.

21. … Kd7

The king claims an unorthodox castle conveniently built just before his eyes.

22. f3?! …

The position is so unusual it proves difficult to assess. A draw was offered by White, but equal isn't an applicable word in this jungle.

22. … Be6 23. f4 exf4

The slumbering monster on c5 awakes!

24. Rxf4 h4 25. Nf3 h3 26. g4?

g3 is less weakening, though the position is difficult to hold.

26. ... Rg8!

The h-pawn remain a serious thorn, and now Black rolls out the cannons. When shall the queen be called to service?

27. e5 Bxg4!

Well calculated, the discovered attack will prove deadly.

28. Rxf7+?

Rather odd taking a pawn with check loses a rook.

28. … Ke8 29. e6 Bxe6 30. Kf1 Kxf7 31. Qf2 Rg2!?

Allowing a double check is usually fatal, yet here it hastens White's demise.

32. Ne5+ Ke8 33. Qf3 dxe5 34. Qh5+ Kd7 35. Qh7+ Qe7 36. Qxe7+ Kxe7 37. Rb7 Kd6 38. Rb8 Rg8 39. Rb2 e4 40. dxe4 Bxc4+ 41. Ke1 Rh5 42. Rd2+ Ke5 43. Rd7 h2 44. Re7+ Kd6 45. Rxc7 h1=Q+ 46. Kd2 Rg2+ 47. Kc3 Kxc7 48. a4 Qc1+ 49. Kd4 c5# 0-1

A very creative, counter-attacking game that was well played by both sides. Played in the penultimate round of the NM Open, White went on to win first in the tournament, and Black (a 5th grader at Escuela del Sol) tied for second in the U1200. This proves every player, regardless of age or experience, is capable of great chess. The solution to the earlier variation is 21. … Bf3!! Taking the bishop results in mate in two via queen and rook. Taking the rook fails to 22. … Qg5 23. g3 Qh5! with mate to follow.

NM Open, Section 3, Round 5

Anthony Soria (1126) v. Mike Wylie (805)

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bc4 Nf6 4. Nc3 Bb4 5. 0-0 Bxc3 6. bxc3 d5?!

You can make an argument for 5. … Bxc3, but 6. … d5 opens the position when Black's king is still in the center and while White has the bishop pair. All that adds to a very dangerous position for Black.

7. exd5 Nxd5 8. Re1 Bg4 9. h3 …

9. Nxe5! would have been even stronger. 9. … Bxd1 10. Nxc6+ and White will enjoy a healthy material advantage.

9. … Bxf3 10. Qxf3 Nf4?

Black correctly identified the danger to the knight, but moved the knight to an equally dangerous square.

11. Ba3!? …

Of course 11. Qxf4! is best, but given Black's king's predicament being trapped in the center, and the danger that remains looming over Black's pieces, I might have played this exciting move as well!

11. … Qd7 12. d3 f6 13. Rb1 Rb8 14. Bb5 Nd5 15. Bxc6 …

Now, or on the next move, 15. d4! would have cracked the path to Black's king wide open.

15. … Qxc6 16. c4 Nb6 17. Qxc6+ bxc6 18. c5 Nd7 19. Rxb8+ Nxb8 20. d4! …

Throwing open the door to Black's king.

20. … Kf7 21. c3 Re8!

Solidifying his position.

22. Bb4 e4?!

Black has returned from a cliff's edge, gotten his king out of danger, and solidified his structure. Not bad defensive play! However, the position remains tediously close to returning to collapse. 22. … Re7! was necessary to defend the c7-pawn and keep his position intact. If 23. Ba5 then 23. … exd4! 24. Rxe7+ Kxe7 25. cxd4 Kd7 when Black has a very comfortable endgame.

23. Ba5! …

A fine move by White! White hits the c7-pawn just in time to cause Black some very annoying, and serious, problems. **23. … Re7**

The right idea, but played a move too late.

24. Rb1!

Now Black will have to jettison the pawn to save the knight. Even more importantly, White's bishop becomes a monster after reaching the d6-square.

24. … e3?! 25. fxe3 Nd7 26. Bxc7 Nf8?!

26. … Nxc5! would have been a good try to reaching a better endgame.

27. Rb7 Nd7?

27. … Ne6! would have won White's over-ambitious bishop.

28. Kf2 Ke8 29. Rxa7 g5 30. Bd6 Re6 31. a4 Nf8 32. Ra8+!

A skewer to wrap the game up.

32. … Kf7 33. Rxf8+ Kg6 34. Re8?? …

I assume time pressure was likely a factor here. Now Black is back in the game, though White's passed a-pawn leaves him with a position that isn't worse.

34. … Rxe8 35. Bc7 Ra8 36. a5 h5 37. Kf3 Kf5 38. e4+ Kg6 39. d5 cxd5 40. exd5 Kf7 41. d6 Ke8 42. c6 … 1-0

Black resigned a few short moves later.

NM Open, Scholastic, Round 4

Arjun Grandhe (789) v. Aarav Patel (503)

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Nc3 g6 4. Bc4 e6?!

This makes Black's dark squares awfully tender.

5. d4 cxd4 6. Nxd4 Nxd4?

Black not only left the dark squares wide open, but then invited White's queen to get comfy where she can see all of them.

7. Qxd4 Nf6 8. Qd1? …

Instead of retreating the queen from her active post White had a number of options for seizing the dark squares. Both 8. e5! and 8. Bg5! leave White with a crushing advantage over most of the board and in control of key weaknesses in Black's camp.

8. … Bg7 9. 0-0 0-0 10. b3?!

10. … d5! would have cracked the position wide open when many of White's pieces are undefended and off balance.

10. … d6

11. Bb2 Bd7 12. e5?!

While bravely probes in the center, opening lines for his pieces. But, a pawn's a pawn, and a central pawn is particularly useful. If White can't make use of his piece activity, Black's extra pawn will make itself felt.

12. … dxe5 13. Qf3 Bc6! 14. Qh3 h6 15. Re1 Qd2!

Headed right into White's position to pester his activity.

16. Rad1 Qxc2 17. Re2 Qf5! 18. Qxf5 exf5 19. Rxe5 …

19. Ne4! would have sealed the wayward rook behind dangerous territory.

19. … Rad8 20. Rxd8 Rxd8 21. Ra5 Ne4!

There's the mark! White can't deal with the numerous threats to his own pieces and his vulnerable king.

22. Nxe4 Rd1+ 23. Bf1 Bxe4 24. Bxg7 Bd3!

An important intermezzo.

25. g3 Bxf1 26. h3 Bxh3+

I haven't seen a king hunted this much since (insert medieval drama of choice here).

27. Kh2 Bg4 28. Bxh6 Bf3 29. Kh3?

White could have fought on with 29. g4.

29. … Rh1# 0-1

As a young man, just discovering that there was a bigger, wider world of chess, I was frustrated that I always had to travel to find enough games. Like many New Mexico chess players, I lived in a small town. Ruidoso, while a gorgeous place to grow up, simply didn't have a thriving chess community back then. My father, patient and encouraging as could be, drove me to all the bigger tournaments in Albuquerque. It was there that I learned a piece of how much greater, and well connected, the chess world was.

I got to hear the talk of the town – what clubs was everyone playing in, what openings were all the rage, who had gotten better since the last tournament, who was new. It was in these settings that I felt like one piece of a much greater whole, and I wanted to discover everything there was to discover about this new and strange world. This hunger for more and more chess invariably led me to discover the Desert Knight.

I was entranced. At the turn of a page, I could see everything that had happened since I last left. I saw the games of familiar names, friends that I had made while wandering the tournament hall, either vanquish others or be vanquished themselves. I felt the rush of seeing my own name published in the Desert Knight, sometimes because of a crushing victory and sometimes because of a disappointing blunder that suddenly and unexpectedly ended the game.

For me, the value in the Desert Knight was twofold. Firstly, it was a way to study chess games. Often these games I studied proved even more valuable than studying the names of illusive geniuses from the past. Because I might someday play the names I saw in the Desert Knight and then I would be better prepared for them. Secondly, and most importantly, it made me feel more connected to this wide world I had stumbled upon. When I saw my name in the Desert Knight, both beaten and victorious, I knew I had given something back to this strange society that was already giving so much to me.

As Desert Knight Editor, my mission is also twofold. To show you great games from our own crop of New Mexico chess players, and to help you feel more connected to our wider chess community. To this end, I would like you to hear from all sorts of people in our community. Board members of NMCO, members of far-flung chess clubs many of us have never heard of, and anyone who might have a unique perspective to share with us will all be the sorts I'd like to contribute to the Desert Knight. In this way, I hope to connect our timeless game with the very people who build on it every day.

Without further ado, I would like to re-introduce you to the classic New Mexico chess tradition of the Desert Knight.

Douglas Thigpen
Desert Knight Editor
New Mexico Chess Organization

Manzano Mesa Multigenerational Center Chess Club (SE Albuquerque) –Ron Kensek

In 2014, Bob Nolan made a post to the NMCO Forum asking if there was interest in a chess club at M3C. Bob would later win the 2015 and 2016 NM Cups (perhaps the last years that was held?) and is our 2018 state Senior Champion. The location is a few blocks from where I live, so we began an e-mail exchange.

The club started in the fall of 2015. Bob's vision was a weekly club with mostly casual play, availability of instruction and occasional structured activities. It was important to me to have this be as free as possible. I never hired anyone for coaching, relying on books, magazines and especially participating in the local chess club (named the "Cheektowaga Chess Club" which met at the Kenmore-Tonawanda YMCA just north of Buffalo, NY). At least 10 of us eventually became masters from the old 'hood, coming from different ethnicities, neighborhoods, schools, and spiritual lives. As unpaid volunteers for the M3C, we get the room for free, and regulars are encouraged to become a member of the M3C (now up to $20/yr, free to check out or visit – other ABQ memberships might be ok).

We knew Friday nights would be controversial – though oddly for the same reason. Friday nights are often opportunities to do something more easily than work- or school-nights. Some of would like to do chess while others may have different ideas.

The club is made up of complete beginners to masters. While the mainstay is the casual play, we have tried a few lectures (craved by some, abhorred by others), game analysis, puzzles, and studies. While regular chess is the norm, we also have had 4-way team chess (one board), bughouse team chess (two boards), and alternating-team chess (one board). There are occasional give-away games, pawn wars, and even Krieg-Spiel. There are also Knight Tours, some number games, Pokémon-Go, occasional assistance with homework (particularly math), and a few parties.

The Great Eddie Sedillo regaled us (complete with slideshow!) with his adventure in playing in the 2016 Gibraltar Open (same section as former World Champion Anand and other chess celebs). He became friends with a fellow named Sunil, who Eddie did not know before, who shortly introduced him to his world-famous stepson, Hikaru. Eddie also won against an IM in a side event.

The club is presently fairly small, though we hope someday you'll join us <grin>. It is on the SW corner of Southern and Elizabeth, not far from the National Museum of Nuclear Science and History.

Report by Matt Grinberg

We crowned a first time New Mexico Chess Champion this year at the Wyndham Hotel in Albuquerque, Corbin Gustafson (2110). Against a strong field of players he scored 5.5 out of 6 to outscore the field by 1.5 miles… excuse me, that is 1.5 points, but it might as well have been miles. His performance boosted his rating to 2144.

This year the New Mexico Championship was organized as a 6 round three day event with two games each on November 9, 10 and 11. Players could also opt to play a two day schedule where they would play three quick games Saturday morning and merge with the three day players on Saturday afternoon. There were three sections – Open, Reserve (U1800) and Novice (U1200). There was also a one day scholastic section on Saturday. The four sections combined drew 68 players, including a few from Colorado and Texas.

The annual NMCO elections were also held. Andrew Flores is the new President.

Open Section

The way the Open Section split between the 2 day with 6 players and the three day with 11 players was rather odd. The top player, Andrew Flores (2201) played in the 3 day, but the next three, Steve Sandager (2200), Doug Thigpen (2170) and Corbin Gustafson (2110), all played in the 2 day. If I (Matt Grinberg (1958)) had known that, I might have opted to play in the three day.

Two Day

As the fourth rated in the 6 player 2 day, I had to play 13-time New Mexico Champion, Steve Sandager in the first round. Going into the game, Steve was the only player in my life I had played more than 4 times without even a draw. Naturally I lost again, now 6 in a row. Meanwhile 3-time New Mexico Champion Doug won against Tim Martinson (1812) and Corbin won against Sophia Moore (1527) of Las Cruces.

In the second round Doug won against Steve. Corbin, as the lowest rated player with 1, was paired against me, the highest rated player with 0. Naturally I lost again. With 0 out of 2 I was clearly out of the running, but with those pairings I achieved my main goal of the tournament! I determined a few months ago that I had played at least one USCF rated game against a state champion (former, current or future) in each of the last 49 years, but had no such game yet for 2018. Now I have two, even if I did lose to both.

In the third round, Corbin beat Doug and Steve beat Tim. Thus Corbin came out of the 2 day as the only undefeated player while Doug and Steve were both 2-1.

Three Day

Meanwhile, in the 3 day strange things were happening. Top rated former New Mexico Champion, Andrew Flores, lost his first game to Munir Hammad (1836). He won in the second round against Tad Snediker (1751), but lost again in the third round to Peter Cueno (1929).

Second rated Eddie Wyckoff (2035) won his first round game against Peter Berzanskis (1808). But then he lost his second round game to Laurence Wutt (1919) and drew his third round game against Holly Mc Roberts (1643). Laurence not only won against Eddie, but also won in the first round against Holly and in the third round against Andrew Ackerman (1968) to emerge from the 3 day as the only undefeated player.

Merged

For the fourth round the 2 day and 3 day sections merged. Corbin Gustafson and Laurence Wutt were tied for first with 3-0. The following players were tied for third with 2-1: Steve Sandager; Doug Thigpen; Munir Hammad; Andrew Ackerman; Peter Cuneo.

The fourth round left Corbin as the only player with a perfect score when he beat Laurence. Doug and Munir both took half point byes, while Steve and Andrew Ackerman drew, and Eddie Wyckoff got himself back into contention by winning against Peter.

Corbin racked up his fifth straight win by beating Steve in round 5. Andrew Flores got to a plus score for the first time by winning against Christian Von Huene (1728). Doug took another half point bye (he told me he was not in a competitive mood for this tournament). Laurence won against Munir to keep in contention for first and Eddie won against Andrew Ackerman.

Going into the final round Corbin's perfect 5-0 score meant that he only needed a draw to clinch sole first place. The only player with a chance to tie Corbin was Laurence, but they had already played each other. Corbin was paired against Eddie. Eddie gave up an exchange for a speculative attack and then followed with a rook sacrifice, but in the end Corbin held the draw. Laurence lost to Andrew Flores so Corbin took first with 5.5, 1.5 points ahead of the players tied for second at 4. Doug won against Andrew Ackerman. The players tied for second through fifth were Andrew Flores, Doug, Eddie and Laurence. Matt Grinberg, after losing his first two games, scored 3.5 out of his last 4 to take sixth place.

Final round action!

Closest to the camera is first board. Eddie Wyckoff (White) has just offered his rook on f6 against 2018 New Mexico Champion, Corbin Gustafson. The sacrifice got Corbin's attention! On second board, Laurence Wutt has Black against Andrew Flores. On third board, Andrew Ackerman has Black against Doug Thigpen. On fourth board, Steve Sandager has White against Munir Hammad.

Reserve Section

With 21 players, the Reserve (U1800) was the largest section. Top rated Francisco Lopez (1797), from Washington according to the USCF, took first with 5 out of 6. His only loss came in the last round to Preston Herrington (1642). Francisco's only

challenger for first going into the last round was John Scott (1476). The door was open for John to tie for first when Francisco lost, but John went down to Paul Padilla (1624) and had to settle for a fourth place tie at 4 points with Stephen Marquez (1590), Anthony Sandoval (1360) and Melvin Sharp (698). Melvin raised his provisional rating an astounding 556 points to 1254! With their final round wins, Paul and Preston tied for second at 4.5.

Novice Section

In the 14 player Novice (U1200), Felipe Montes finished first at 5-1. His pairings were very tough. None of his opponents finished with a negative score. He faced all the players who finished second through fifth, winning against former NMCO President, Annabelle Romero (1063), Mital Patel (UNR) and Gary Roybal (1123), while losing only to Marcelo Tohen in round 5. Felipe clinched first place with his final round victory against John Letard (1194). Annabelle secured a tie for second with 4.5 after her last round win against Anthony Soria (1126). Marcelo had a chance for first after his fifth round win against Felipe, but had to settle for a second place tie when he drew against Gary in the final round.

Scholastic Section

The 16 player, 4 round Scholastic saw the only perfect score of the tournament. Unrated Charle Koch on the way to the perfect score and first place defeated three of the four players who tied for second with 3 points: Tobias Fernandez (677); Dhruv Grandhe (474); Aarav Patel (503). Also tied for second was Esme La Pointe (402).

Elections and NMCO Board

Prior to the last round, the elections for NMCO officers were held with players present and meeting the age requirement voting. Unlike last year, everything went smoothly. The following officers were elected to serve until elections at the New Mexico Open next year:

President: Andrew Flores

Will Barela chose not to run again and Andrew moved up from Vice President.

Vice President: Peter Cuneo

Treasurer: Dean Brunton

Dean has served in this office for ever and gets kudos from everyone.

Secretary: Nick Miller

Nick defeated former Secretary, Michael Hibner.

Also on the board are the following appointed officers

Desert Knight Editor: Doug Thigpen

Webmaster: Andrew Ackerman

Tournament Organizer: Richard Warren

Upcoming Event

Feb. 9-10 Memorial Open & Senior Championship Open

4-SS, G/120 d10 (except Scholastic: 4-SS G/30 d5). The Meadowlark Senior Center, 4330 Meadowlark Ln SE, Rio Rancho, NM 87124. In 4 sections, **EF:** $40 (except Scholastic, $15.) For Open, Reserve and Novice sections - $10 EF discount if received by 2/6/19. **$$:** Open: b/30 1st $300, 2nd $200, 1st U1900 $100. *Top finishing NM Resident (over 50) is 2019 NM Senior Champion, co-champions if a tie*; Prize money will be awarded based on finish regardless of residency. Reserve: b/30 1st $275, 2nd $175, 1st U1400 $100. Novice: b/30 1st $250, 2nd $150, 1st U1000 $100. Scholastic: **(2/9/2019 only)** Medals for: K-2nd, 3rd-5th, 6th-8th and 9th-12th grades. Plaques will be awarded to 1st place finisher in open section and to the Senior Champion. Unrated players are eligible for half of the sections cash prizes, except in the open, where unrated players are eligible for the entire prize fund. **Reg:** Online open until 8:00pm on 2/8/19; Onsite, Saturday (2/9/19), Scholastic: 8 – 8:30AM; other Sections: Sat. 8:15 – 9:00AM. **Rds:** Open, Reserve & Novice: Sat. & Sun 9:30AM, 2:30PM; Scholastic: Sat. 9:00AM, 10:10AM, 1PM, 2:10PM. **W:** Site is accessible to wheelchairs. **Bye:** Up to two, ½ pt. byes can be requested prior to start of 1st rnd. **Ent:** Online entries via website www.nmchess.org or mail entry to: **NMCO, P.O. Box 4215, Albuquerque, NM 87196-4215**

Solutions

Tactic # 1 **23.g6! fxg6** [23...f5 24.g7!! Kf7 25.Qg3 Rxc2 26.Nxc2 Qxc2+ 27.Ka1 Bxe4 28.Rg1] **24.Ng5 Bd5 25.Qxg6+ Kd7 26.Ngxe6 Qa5 27.b3 Bxe6 28.Qxe6+ Kd8 29.Rfe1** **1–0**	***Tactic # 2*** **25...Bxa3 26.bxa3 Rxa3** [26...b2?? 27.Rc2 Qa7 28.Rxb2=] [26...Qa7 is still winning, but the lines become muddled.] **27.Re1 Qa6 28.Nh2 Ra1+ 29.Qxa1 Qd3+ 30.Kb2 Qc2+ 31.Ka3 b2 32.Rc1 bxa1Q+** [32...Qd3+ 33.Ka2 bxa1Q+ 34.Rxa1 Qa6#] **33.Rxa1 Qb2+** **0–1**
Tactic # 3 **25...Rh3 26.Nxa3** [26.Qb5+ Kf8 27.Qb7 Rf3 28.Ng3 Rf1+ 29.Nxf1 gxf1Q#] [26.Ng3 an improvement over the game continuation, but black is still winning. Qc8 27.Qb5+ Kf8 28.Rc6 Qd8 29.Qb7 a2–+] **26...Rf3** **0–1**	***Tactic # 4*** 65.Ra6+ Qa7 66.Rxa7+ Kxa7 67.Kb2 e5 68.Kc3 d4+ 69.Kd3 Ka6 70.Re1 **1–0**